

CITY OF ABERDEEN
PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

A meeting of the Aberdeen Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m., September 9, 2020, in the Council Chambers by Chairman Schlottman.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Mark Schlottman, Commissioners Dominique Edwards, Michael Hiob, Sam Posten, Terri Preston, DeAunte Printup, and Amy Snyder

OTHERS PRESENT: Phyllis Grover, Director of Planning & Community Development
Kyle Torster, Public Works Director
Councilman Jason Kolligs, City Council liaison
Gil Jones, Recording Secretary

Chairman Schlottman reviewed the COVID-19 protocols and ways to access the meeting by video. John Landbeck introduced Don Crites as the new liaison from the Aberdeen Volunteer Fire Department. Chairman Schlottman congratulated Mrs. Grover on her recent election to the Foundation Board of The ARC Northern Chesapeake Region. He also pointed out the absence of grass cutting along Route 40 and the potential of hazards for drivers and pedestrians. Mr. Hiob said Councilman Hiob had called the State Highway Administration (SHA) and they conceded this year's contractor is "not good." Since then, they have come out to do some minor trimming.

The minutes of the August 12, 2020, meeting were approved as presented.

AGENDA ITEMS:

1. Review of Proposed Amendments to the Development Code, Ordinance 20-O-10

Mrs. Grover recounted the amendments presented at the last meeting and the review comments. She added a definition for pet day care, as this did not appear in the Code, and added an entry in the condition and use charts.

The Planning Commission undertook review of the various amendments, especially the one speaking to pet day care. Chairman Schlottman asked Vaughn Taylor, Jr., owner and operator along with his wife of the recently opened LaBella Pet Boutique on North Parke Street, for his comments. Mr. Taylor spoke to what his business now offers and what the nature of operation would entail if allowed to provide expanded services. He said waste would be handled with an indoor run and that pets are not currently walked outdoors to relieve themselves. Their landlord is in favor of the expanded operation and a general manager from one of the hotels has reached out with interest in their service for those traveling and needing a temporary place for their pets.

Mrs. Snyder asked if their services would be provided just during the day or would there also be kennel services; Mr. Taylor said it would just be during the day.

Mr. Posten asked if a hotel wished to avail themselves of their services what that scenario would look like; Mr. Taylor that would need to be worked out.

Mr. Hiob pointed out the language in the proposed amendment says dogs are “typically” boarded and feels that could create a gray area in interpretation.

Mrs. Edwards asked about their current hours; Mr. Taylor said 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Ms. Edwards asked if they took care of just dogs or other pets as well; Mr. Taylor said mainly dogs.

Councilman Jason Kolligs commended Mr. Taylor on his business.

Mr. Schlottman also commended Mr. Taylor on his business and feels he’s filling a need, but felt the concern of the Planning Commission would be over use of Festival Park as part of the business to walk the dogs and would be opposed to that, due to the waste and interface with the public. Mr. Taylor said everything would be indoors and that they are looking at a variety of enhancements to the space.

Mrs. Edwards asked about outdoor activities; Mr. Taylor said they would consult with the pet owner on their expectations along these lines. He added that he has checked with surrounding business owners on this and they have no objections.

Discussion ensued over definitions and various items for allowance and disallowance, such as adding back in the prohibition on using sea containers for storage. Additional discussion ensued over banners. Ms. Preston asked if these were always considered a form of advertisement. Discussion ensued over type, number, and the means of advertising for small business. Mr. Torster opined that the issue may be the number of these and asked whether the idea was to limit the signs by type or number and what the overall rationale is. Additional discussion ensued over enforcement, signs in the State right-of-way, and limiting the number of signs. Mrs. Grover recommended leaving these particular regulations as they are.

Mrs. Grover said he would incorporate the comments and changes and present the updates next month.

2. Review of Proposed Amendments to the Development Code to allow Assisted Living Facilities as a Special Exception in the R-1, Low Density Residential zoning district

Location: 707-715 Beards Hill Road

Representatives: Brad Stover, attorney, Shaffer, McLauchlin & Stover; Thomas Burns, Jr., property owner; Tom Miner, Frederick Ward Associates (FWA)

Mr. Stover said a group approached Mr. Burns concerning the land he owns off Beards Hill Road, with the intent of putting in an assisted living facility with 80 to 120 beds. However, such a facility is not allowed in an R-1 district under the current Development Code. Mr. Stover

suggested allowing such a use in the R-1 as a Special Exception and prepared proposed Code amendments based on Harford County's guidelines. He also presented a concept drawing of the proposed facility with R-3 setback requirements mirroring those of the County.

Mrs. Grover said that the current assisted living facilities on West Bel Air Avenue are on large lots. She recommended that if the change is made that R-1 setbacks be required, that such a development be consistent with that of the area, and that language be included that protects the single-family nature of the area. Discussion ensued over the number of beds per acre, on-site security, and general operations.

Mr. Schlottman asked about the nature of the on-site security mentioned by Mr. Stover. Mr. Burns said he knows of only one other assisted living facility of this type and it is in Anne Arundel County. He said the managers, Volunteers of America (VOA), prefer a quiet area, as some of the clients will have anxiety issues. He added that the facility would need to be fenced due to some of the residents and medical issues involved. Mr. Stover offered to formulate additional specifications if needed.

Mr. Schlottman asked for confirmation that VOA runs halfway houses, as this is what he is familiar with as to their work; Mr. Burns said they also do things for veterans and those with autism. Mr. Schlottman asked why such sophisticated security would be needed; Mr. Burns said it may not be, but protection of the residents from the outside may be needed. Mr. Stover added that all operations would be subject to State requirements.

Mr. Printup expressed concern over the security questions, but sees no problem with the change recommendation.

Mrs. Snyder felt that twenty units per acre seems like a lot for R-1.

Mr. Posten asked if this would be a multi-level facility; Mr. Miner said it would be three stories. Mr. Posten asked about parking; Mr. Stover and Mr. Miner said that which is shown on the drawing is based on Harford County's regulations (these would need to be changed if they are inconsistent with those of the City).

Mr. Hiob expressed concern over the security issue and asked Mrs. Grover if there have been any issues with other assisted living facilities in the City; Mrs. Grover said we have had no issues, that those on West Bel Air Avenue received Board of Appeals approval with conditions attached to all three. Mr. Schlottman asked how many other units are in the City; Mrs. Grover said there are a number on both East and West Bel Air Avenue. The height of this unit would also need to be looked at as it relates to the current Code.

Mr. Hiob pointed out that the Planning Commission did not have an opportunity to see this plan prior to the meeting.

Ms. Preston said she has difficulty envisioning such an operation of this scope in this area.

Mr. Schlottman opined that this area has become valuable real estate. He asked if the owner of the Summerlin Apartments has been contacted and spoken to; Mr. Burns said he spoke with them

a couple of years ago, but theirs is a totally different clientele. The VOA would be permanent housing for life, from birth to death. Mr. Schlottman asked if there are any facilities like this in the area; Mr. Stover said there is one in Anne Arundel County, but he did not know if it was under VOA. Mr. Schlottman indicated that the Catholic Charities facility is for independent living.

Ms. Preston asked for more information from VOA as to what this facility would be designed for.

Mr. Posten asked if this facility would offer three meals a day; Mr. Burns said he thought it would depend on the nature of the handicap of the individual, but would depend on the determination of the medical staff.

Mr. Schlottman felt it would be good to have a representative from VOA come in to speak to what the nature of this project would entail, as it doesn't seem clear as to what is being proposed.

Discussion ensued over acreage requirements and lots in other R-1 areas such as Twin Oaks.

Councilman Kolligs asked if a re-zoning was considered; Mr. Stover said he would have a difficult legal argument showing a mistake or change in the neighborhood.

Mr. Hiob asked if this property fronted on Maxa Road; Mr. Stover said it does. Mr. Hiob asked if they would have an ability for access off Maxa Road; Mr. Burns said they are blocked by the wetlands on that side. Mr. Hiob expressed concern over the lack of a secondary access.

Mr. Schlottman asked if the eight acres includes the wetland areas; Mr. Stover said it did. Mr. Schlottman asked about the net useable acreage; Mr. Miner said it depends on what you see as useable; Mr. Schlottman said that which you can actually build on. Mr. Miner said it would be three or four acres.

Mr. Schlottman feels the presenters should come back with a formal report and presentation and bring a representative from VOA with them.

Mrs. Edwards feels the focus should be on the changes to the Code, not the operator.

Mr. Schlottman feels the Planning Commission should look at the area in its totality.

3. Review Revised Preliminary Site Plan for parking lot expansion at the former Pier One warehouse

Location: 913 Old Philadelphia Road

Representatives: Kate Connelly, Frederick Ward Associates (FWA)

Ms. Connelly indicated the previous plan was approved by the Planning Commission in July for 772 spaces. This updated plan seeks an additional 250 spaces plus 92 for trucks. The new tenant, Amazon, will also be installing a security fence with guard shack and be operating three shifts. A traffic study is in progress.

Mrs. Grover asked if the trucks would be vans or box trucks; Ms. Connelly said she didn't know. Mrs. Grover said the plan needs to include the parking space size and asked if there would be entry improvements off Old Philadelphia Road; Ms. Connelly said there were none planned, unless they are required by the SHA.

Mrs. Edwards said the traffic study is much anticipated, as Old Philadelphia Road is at times a truck parking lot. She expressed concern with the addition of the guard shack and the potential for additional backups onto Old Philadelphia Road. Ms. Connelly indicated there is room for a stack of five trucks along the entry to the warehouse.

Mr. Hiob asked about the amount of impervious surface; Ms. Connelly said the total amount is decreased.

Mr. Posten asked if the adjacent wetlands would be impacted; Ms. Connelly said no. Mr. Posten said traffic in the area has increased dramatically, especially with the introduction of Walmart delivery services.

Mr. Schlottman said there has been an increase in traffic, but this project should be fine.

Motion by Mr. Hiob, seconded by Mrs. Snyder, to approve the Preliminary Site Plan, with minor changes. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Review Revision of Amended Subdivision Plat for Brentwood Square

Representative: Kyle Torster

Mr. Torster reviewed the revision for the Brentwood Square subdivision. As the City is preparing to build a pump station next to the water tower on Ray Avenue, a land swap with an adjoining resident is necessary. The existing easement will remain. This is an even trade, with no monetary exchange.

Mr. Hiob pointed out some needed reference and spelling corrections. He asked Mr. Torster if this project would result in replacement of the Graceford Drive pump station; Mr. Torster said it would.

Motion by Ms. Preston, seconded by Mr. Printup, to approve the Amended Subdivision Plat, with corrections. Motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business or public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Planning Commission Chairman

Recording Secretary

Date of Approval